

Soup's On!

Reader recipe contest
finalists bring the heat

Page 8

Plus:

Arkansas State Fair
Rural Teachers of the Year
Cooperative Caucus



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with hearty flavor, the Arkansas Harvest
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Trevor Rogers of Fort Smith is a finalist
in Arkansas Living's soup contest.

Photo by Jennifer Christman Cia



KARA RILEY

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President and CEO

Vernon "Buddy" Hasten

Chief External Affairs Officer

Bill Gossage

Director of Publications and Editor

Jennifer Christman Cia

Associate Editor

Nancy Moore

Advertising Coordinator

Amber Helms

Communications Specialist

Rachel Blocker

Communications and Content Coordinator

Addison McCauley

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Arkansas Living
1 Cooperative Way, Little Rock, AR 72209
(501) 570-2311 Email: arkansasliving@aeci.com
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 510, Little Rock, AR 72203
Advertising Department: (501) 570-2311
Email: advertising@aeci.com

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Gather 'Round the Table

BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

There's at least one person who won't be enjoying our prize-winning

Pig Pickin' Potato Soup.

The winner's husband.

Christi Strayhorn's creamy, dreamy concoction was the souperstar when our staff and coworkers sampled the six finalists in this year's reader recipe contest (see page 8). Her husband, Mark, however, is a "really picky eater," so the Sherwood cook and Baptist Health executive assistant saves more adventurous culinary experiments for work and family gatherings ... and Arkansas Living!

Turns out, we already have a history of eating well, thanks to Christi. Her luscious Butterfinger Dip was a contest finalist last year (arkansaslivingmagazine.com/story/dip-dip-hooray) — and a personal favorite (remember, with the Biscoff cookies, y'all? Sweet mercy!).

"When I cook for a crowd, I like to make food that tastes hearty, comforting and is memorable," Christi says. "So, in my mind that equals rich and full of fat! I take great pleasure in watching people eat something I have prepared that they enjoy. It makes me truly happy."

Us too, Christi. We'll take whatever Mark's not having!

And speaking of recipes, no bowl of soup should have to go it alone. Therefore, our creative food writer, Juliana Goodwin, has prepared grilled cheese varieties to pair with our soup finalists (see page 32).

You'll also find recipes shared by electric cooperative employees from around Arkansas (see page 34). It is October, after all, which is National

Cooperative Month.

Since we're gathered 'round the table, I'd like to pull up a few more chairs. Every month, we work with communicators at the state's electric cooperatives to customize the local editions of Arkansas Living. We couldn't make one magazine, let alone 16 versions per month without them:



Christi Strayhorn of Sherwood shows off her new GreenPan Elite Slow Cooker after winning Arkansas Living's soup contest.

- Barbara Jenkins, Arkansas Valley Electric
- Lisa Jacks, Ashley-Chicot Electric
- Mike Berry, Christy Tucker and Reagan Simmons, C & L Electric
- Claudia Harp, Carroll Electric
- Molly Jett, Clay County Electric
- Lindsey Bowman, Craighead Electric
- Brynn Bowen, Farmers Electric
- Tonya Sexton, First Electric
- Brad Harrison, Mississippi County Electric
- Tori Moss, North Arkansas Electric
- Sabrina Estridge and Kari Strickland, Ouachita Electric
- Angie Hutchins, Petit Jean Electric
- Chris Parker, Rich Mountain Electric
- Shelley Tucker, South Central Arkansas Electric
- Kecia Wolf and Rhonda Morrow, Southwest Arkansas Electric
- Anna Howton, Woodruff Electric

While we're serving up plenty of good food this month, I'm even more thankful for the good company. To everyone who contributes a recipe, a story idea or a helping hand along the way, thank you.

With dashes of gratitude,

Jennifer

Jennifer Christman Cia
jennifer.cia@aeci.com

Thanks to Teachers

BY VERNON “BUDDY” HASTEN

President and CEO of Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. and Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation



There is an old saying: “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

This saying absolutely captures the transformative impact that good teachers can have on our lives.

There is a lot of debate these days about how much we should spend on education. America ranks fourth in the world in educational spending but has experienced a slow decline in international test scores, as measured by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Internationally, America ranks 28th in math and 12th in science out of 37 countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Interestingly, Japan ranks 20th in spending and first in math and science scores internationally.

While there are many factors that drive these metrics, it's clear that spending more money doesn't always increase knowledge or produce a better return on investment. Benjamin Franklin said it best: “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.”

This is where I give a big shout-out to the great teachers in our state who truly inspire, motivate and unlock the potential of their students. The teachers we never forget are the ones who saw something in us that we didn't see. They didn't just put numbers or letters on a chalkboard. They created the spark, then fanned the flames, allowing us to find our unique talents and abilities, and put meaning into our lives.

Plutarch, an ancient Greek philosopher, said, “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” Artist Pablo Picasso said, “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.”

Great teachers show us where to look but do not tell us what to see. They ask questions that challenge, and they

shine lights down dark pathways that we are afraid to travel alone. They take us by the hand and lead us to knowledge and understanding.

Recently, I was in the waiting room at a doctor's office in Bryant and met Carol Rushing, who had been a kindergarten teacher for many years. She told me that kids never forget their kindergarten teacher. Carol speaks the truth.

Mine was Miss Dinkel, and I remember her vividly. I will not lie. Miss Dinkel and I had a rough start.

One of our learning exercises consisted of a cardboard shoe cutout with laces woven into it, and the task was tying the shoestrings. I could not. Another lesson involved a cardboard cutout of a rotary dial telephone, and on the center of the dial was a big white space to write your telephone number. I could not.

This prompted a parent-teacher conference. My single mom met with Miss Dinkel, who proceeded to tell her that I was not the brightest bulb in the class. Miss Dinkel said that I could not tie my shoes and did not know my telephone number, and this was concerning.

My mom informed her that I had only ever worn cowboy boots and never had to tie shoes, and we did not have a telephone and thus, no telephone number. They reached a consensus that I was not a lost cause, and I remained in the class.

I do not remember my first, second or third grade teachers, but I absolutely remember my fourth grade English teacher, Mrs. Howell. She made us write in a daily journal and gave us feedback on our writing. At this time, I was in a private Catholic school and certainly one of the poorest kids in the class.

Being poor with cheap clothes, shoes with holes

in the soles, and parents who pick you up from school like “Uncle Buck” in a junky car can make a young kid a bit self-conscious, when all the other kids have Nikes, nice clothes and shiny new cars. It can wreak havoc on your confidence and desire to be at school, and ultimately your education.

Mrs. Howell looked past the faded jeans, the worn shoes and the angry kid in her fourth grade class. Instead, she ➤



TEACHERS continued on page 6

Open house held for planned gas plant

Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC) held an open house on Aug. 13 to share details about the planned Independence Gas Plant (IGP) project near Newark.

Held at the nearby Arkansas State University-Newport campus, community members reviewed the plans and learned about the proposed 1,499-megawatt combined-cycle natural gas generation facility.

IGP will be built adjacent to the existing Independence Steam Electric Station. About 800 construction-phase jobs and 25 to 35 permanent jobs will be created, bringing substantial new spending to local businesses.

The anticipated in-service date is scheduled for 2031.



A rendering of the planned Independence Gas Plant near Newark was on display during an Aug. 13 open house at Arkansas State University-Newport.

Legislators deepen understanding of electric cooperatives

On Aug. 6, state legislators and other public officials gathered at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts in Little Rock for an educational session and reception hosted by the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas. The Arkansas Rural Electric Cooperative Caucus (ARECC) event focused on the electric industry, including power generation, transmission, rates, reliability and Arkansas' evolving energy future.

ARECC Senate Chair Matt McKee said understanding the complexities of the electric industry is important as lawmakers consider policies that affect Arkansas' energy future.



Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation and Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. President/CEO Vernon "Buddy" Hasten, left, visits with ARECC House Chair Jack Ladyman during the Aug. 6 educational session in Little Rock.

"We want to understand the regulatory framework, the technology behind the grid and all of the effects that those have," McKee said.

Bryan Singletary, a presenter with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), led an "Electric Cooperative 101" presentation covering the cooperative business model.

Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. Director of Governmental Relations Jennifer Loiacano emphasized the role electric cooperatives play in serving their members.

"We're proud of what we do, and that's serving our members reliably and affordably," Loiacano said.

By building stronger relationships and a deeper understanding of the issues affecting Arkansas' energy future, ARECC members can work together to help keep power affordable and reliable.

See the ARECC special section in the center of this issue.

TEACHERS *continued from page 5*

saw something in me that I didn't know existed. Her daily notes in my journal were kind and thoughtful. Some days, critical, challenging on other days and inspiring every day.

She ignited a spark and then fanned the flames of my imagination, allowing me to see myself in a future better than the present. I am sure that if she were grading this article, there would be many corrections and notes in the margins. But somewhere near the top of the page would be a comment like, "You did it, kid."

Teachers make a difference. If we want to get the best return on our tax dollars for education, history tells us that we should invest in great teachers first. Guy Kawasaki, who helped launch the Macintosh computer at Apple, said, "If you have to put someone on a pedestal, put

teachers. They are society's heroes."

We are doing just that this month by recognizing two amazing rural Arkansas teachers: Jimi Ann Scott, a fifth and sixth grade math teacher at Bobby Barrett Elementary School in Mount Ida, and Carrie Altom, an eighth grade English language arts teacher at Tuckerman High School in Tuckerman. They were recently named the 2026 Arkansas Rural Education Association's Teachers of the Year, proudly sponsored by the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas (see page 12).

Teaching can be a thankless job. When is the last time you reached out and truly thanked a teacher who made a difference in your life? It is never too late, until it is. Thank a teacher today! 

Arkansas 4-H Tech Changemakers build tech skills

Arkansas 4-H Tech Changemakers brought together about 50 youth from across the state on Aug. 5 for training in digital technology. The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture sponsored the event, which was hosted by the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas.

These twice-yearly gatherings equip students with practical STEM and technology skills, along with networking and communication tools.

Participants then return home to share what they've learned with classmates, friends and community groups, strengthening digital literacy for all ages while building more connected communities.



CHANCE ALLMON



CHANCE ALLMON

Arkansas 4-H Tech Changemakers gather Aug. 5 at the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas headquarters for statewide training focused on digital technology, STEM skills and community connection.

Where Is It?

Welcome back to our hidden object game, Where Is It?

In the September issue, we hid a jam jar. Joked one correct reader about where she found it: "The photo contest is jammin'! Top left of page 15, the 'o' in the word 'contest' in the photo contest announcement."

Winners selected in our drawing to receive Arkansas Living grocery totes were:

Linda Vaughan, Mountain Home (North Arkansas Electric Cooperative)

Anne Harris, Van Buren (Arkansas Valley Electric Cooperative)

Stanley Parker, Bentonville (Carroll Electric Cooperative)

Brenda Jones, Brookland (Craighead Electric Cooperative)

Rick Haley, Pocahontas (Clay County Electric Cooperative)

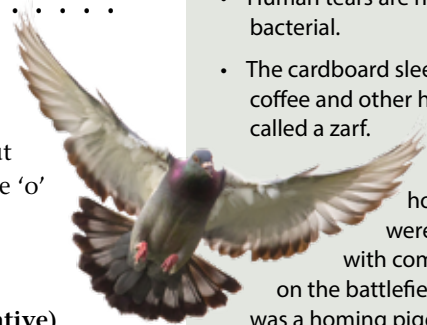
For October, we've hidden this favorite fall flower somewhere in the issue. Think you can find it? We're not giving any hints — mum's the word!

Oct. 15 is the deadline. To enter, click on the "Where Is It?" link on the homepage of arkansaslivingmagazine.com, or go directly to arkansaslivingmagazine.com/where-is-it-contest.

Or mail entries to: Where Is It, Arkansas Living, P.O. Box 510, Little Rock, AR 72203.

Include your name, address and electric co-op (nonmembers also are eligible), plus the correct page number.

** If your magazine arrives after the deadline, submit your entry by the 15th of the following month. We'll send a prize to a randomly selected latecomer. August's winner was: Jane Pessa, Camden (Ouachita Electric Cooperative).*



- There are no muscles in human fingers. The movement of fingers is controlled by muscles in the forearm and palm, which move tendons, then move the fingers.
- Neptune has four seasons, but each season lasts 40 Earth years.
- The word "laser" is actually an abbreviation, meaning Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation.
- In 1926, Andre and Edouard Michelin, founders of the Michelin tire company, created the Michelin Star restaurant ranking to encourage people to drive more, hence, needing to buy more tires. A one-star restaurant represents high-quality food, a two-star ranking means the restaurant is "worth a detour," and a ranking of three Michelin Stars indicates the restaurant is a worthy destination on its own.
- Human tears are naturally anti-bacterial.
- The cardboard sleeve used for coffee and other hot beverages is called a zarf.
- During WWI, homing pigeons were used to assist with communication on the battlefield. Cher Ami was a homing pigeon that served with the 77th Division. Even after being shot, Cher Ami completed a 25-mile flight and delivered a crucial message that helped save 194 soldiers.
- The terms "uppercase" and "lowercase" come from the printing press, as large letters were stored in the upper case and small letters were stored in the lower case.
- "I cannot even imagine where I would be today were it not for that handful of friends who have given me a heart full of joy. Let's face it, friends make life a lot more fun."
— Charles R. Swindoll, pastor and author



Soup's On!

RECIPE CONTEST FINALISTS BRING THE HEAT



Winner!
PIG PICKIN'
POTATO SOUP

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

We asked for your best soup recipes, and y'all caused quite a stir!

After narrowing the Bowl Us Over Soup Contest entries to six finalists, Arkansas Living staff and coworkers grabbed our spoons for the enviable task of choosing a winner. Never mind that it was August in Arkansas. We cranked up our slow cookers — and the air conditioning — and got to tasting.

The taste test revealed a few things about us, too. We like our soups rich and our recipe names memorable. Half of our finalists brought bacon to the bowl. Two-thirds called for heavy cream. Every recipe found room for cheese. And with names like Pig Pickin' Potato, Southern Gold Rush and "Twisted" Taco, they had us smiling before the first spoonful.

Throw in smoked Gouda, hot honey, fresh herbs, a squeeze of lime — even a bottle of beer — and the competition heated up quickly.

In the end, Christi Strayhorn's Pig Pickin' Potato Soup, loaded with tender potatoes, smoky ham, crisp bacon and creamy, cheesy goodness, hogged the spotlight and emerged as our pick of the pot. She won the grand prize: a GreenPan Elite 6-Quart Slow Cooker.

Now that the calendar says it's officially soup season, let the ladling begin!

WINNER

Pig Pickin' Potato Soup

Makes 20 servings.

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1/2 cup white onion, finely diced
- 3 large baking potatoes, peeled and chopped into small cubes
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper, freshly cracked, plus more to taste
- 6 cups chicken broth (I use Swanson)
- Instant potatoes, as needed to thicken
- 1/2 cup smoked ham, finely diced (from a local barbecue restaurant preferred)
- 10 slices bacon, cooked crisp and crumbled, divided (I use Wright's Applewood)

Heat oil in a large soup pot over medium-high heat and saute onion. Add potatoes and season with salt and pepper. Add chicken broth.

Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium and cook until potatoes are tender. Sprinkle in instant potatoes, stirring well, until soup is thickened to your liking.

- 2 cups heavy cream
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup mild or sharp cheddar cheese, shredded, plus more for garnish
- 1/2 cup processed cheese, shredded (I use Velveeta Shreds), plus more for garnish
- 3 green onions, chopped, for garnish
- Oyster crackers, for serving



Add ham, 2/3 of bacon, heavy cream, milk and sour cream. Taste and add more salt and pepper as needed. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Sprinkle in cheeses and stir until melted.

Serve hot, garnished with more cheese, reserved bacon and green onions. Serve with oyster crackers.

Christi Strayhorn, Sherwood (First Electric Cooperative)

FINALISTS

Arkansas Harvest Chicken & Wild Rice Soup

Makes 8-10 servings.



- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 3 carrots, peeled and sliced
- 3 celery stalks, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup uncooked wild rice blend
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 cups rotisserie chicken, shredded
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for garnish
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped, plus more for garnish
- 1/2 lemon, juiced
- Warm, crusty bread for serving

In a large soup pot, melt butter with olive oil over medium heat. Add onion, carrots and celery. Cook for 8-10 minutes until softened. Stir in garlic, salt, pepper, thyme, rosemary and smoked paprika. Cook for 1 minute.

Sprinkle flour over vegetables and stir continuously for about 2 minutes. Slowly whisk in chicken broth until smooth. Stir in wild rice and bay leaf. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 40-45 minutes, or until rice is tender.

Add chicken and cook for another 5 minutes. Stir in heavy cream and Parmesan cheese until melted and creamy. Remove bay leaf. Stir in parsley and lemon juice and adjust seasoning to taste. Serve with warm crusty bread and garnish with extra Parmesan and parsley.

Notes: The fresh lemon juice added at the end brightens the soup and keeps it from tasting overly rich, while the smoked paprika adds a subtle depth that makes people wonder what the secret ingredient is.

Trevor Rogers, Fort Smith (Arkansas Valley Electric Cooperative)

Southern Gold Rush Soup

Makes 8 servings.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 4-6 slices bacon, chopped, divided | 1 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste |
| 1 1/2-2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into bite-sized pieces | 1/2 teaspoon pepper |
| Salt and pepper, for seasoning chicken | 4 cups chicken broth |
| 1 medium onion, diced | 1 cup heavy cream |
| 3-4 garlic cloves, minced | 1 tablespoon butter |
| 2 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into bite-sized cubes | 1 tablespoon brown sugar |
| 2 cups corn | 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar |
| 1 (4-ounce) can green chiles, diced | Fresh cilantro, chopped, for garnish |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons smoked paprika | Sharp cheddar cheese, shredded, for garnish |
| 1 teaspoon chili powder | Green onions, thinly sliced, for garnish |
| 1/2 teaspoon cumin | Hot honey, for garnish |



In a large soup pot, cook bacon until crispy. Remove about half of the bacon and set aside for topping. Leave bacon grease in pot. Season chicken with salt and pepper, and cook in bacon grease until brown. Remove chicken and set aside.

Add onion to pot, and cook until softened. Add garlic and cook until fragrant. Add sweet potatoes, corn, green chiles, smoked paprika, chili powder, cumin, salt and pepper. Stir together. Pour in chicken broth, and return chicken to pot.

Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for

approximately 20-25 minutes, until sweet potatoes are tender and chicken is fully cooked. Remove about 1 1/2 cups soup, including some sweet potatoes and corn, and blend until smooth. Return blended mixture to pot.

Stir in heavy cream, butter, brown sugar and apple cider vinegar. Simmer for another 5 minutes. Garnish with cilantro, reserved bacon, cheddar cheese, sliced green onions and a drizzle of hot honey.

Note: Best the next day! Let sit overnight and reheat before serving!

Tonia Groff, Clinton (Petit Jean Electric Cooperative)



Tortellini Soup

Makes 6-8 servings.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 pound mild Italian sausage | 1 small zucchini, chopped |
| 2 cloves garlic, minced | 1 small yellow squash, chopped |
| 1 small onion, chopped | 1 1/2 tablespoons basil |
| 1 (14.5-ounce) can petite diced tomatoes, undrained | 1 tablespoon oregano |
| 4 cups beef broth | 1 tablespoon rosemary |
| 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste | 1 tablespoon parsley |
| 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce | 1 (20-ounce) package five-cheese tortellini |

In a skillet, cook Italian sausage with garlic and onion until done, making sure to break up sausage into small pieces. Drain grease and place sausage, onion and garlic mixture in a slow cooker.

Add remaining ingredients, except tortellini, stirring well to combine. Cook on low for 8 hours.

Before serving, cook tortellini according to package directions. Cook 6-8 pieces of tortellini per person, not necessarily the whole package. Drain. Place 6-8 pieces tortellini in each bowl and add soup on top.

Notes: This soup is actually better-tasting if, after cooking in the slow cooker for 8 hours, you wait to reheat and eat it the next day. That really enhances the flavor of the soup with all the spices.

Susan Behrmann, Lampe, Missouri (Carroll Electric Cooperative)

“Twisted” Taco Soup

Makes 20 servings.

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---|--|
| 2 | pounds ground chuck | 1 | (11-ounce) can Mexicorn, drained (I use Green Giant) |
| 1/2 | yellow onion, finely chopped | 1 | (4-ounce) can chopped green chilies, undrained (I use Old El Paso) |
| 3 | garlic cloves, minced | 2 | tablespoons lime juice, fresh-squeezed, or more to taste |
| | Salt and pepper, to taste | 1 | (12-ounce) bottle lime-flavored beer (see note) |
| 1 | packet taco seasoning (I use McCormick Original) | 2 | tablespoons fresh cilantro, chopped |
| 1 | tablespoon chili powder (I use McCormick) | | Corn chips (I use Fritos) or cornbread, for serving |
| 1 | (14.5-ounce) can chicken broth (I use Swanson) | | Lime wedges, for garnish |
| 1 | (14.5-ounce) can petite diced tomatoes, undrained (I use Hunt's) | | Cheddar cheese, shredded, for garnish |
| 2 | (10-ounce) cans diced tomatoes and green chilies, undrained (I use Rotel) | | Green onions, chopped, for garnish |
| 1 | (16-ounce) can kidney beans, drained (I use Bush's) | | Sour cream, for garnish |
| 1 | (16-ounce) can pinto beans in mild chili sauce, undrained (I use Bush's Chili Beans) | | |
| 1 | (15-ounce) can black beans, drained (I use Bush's) | | |



In a soup pot, brown ground chuck with onion and garlic. Add salt and freshly cracked pepper to taste. Drain off any excess grease.

Add taco seasoning, chili powder, chicken broth, tomatoes, beans, corn, green chilies, lime juice and beer. If not “soupy” enough, add more chicken broth. Bring to a boil. Cover and reduce heat to low. Simmer for 1 hour.

Add cilantro and simmer for another 20 minutes. Serve with corn chips or cornbread. Garnish with lime wedges, cheddar cheese, green onions and sour cream.

Enjoy piping hot!

Note: Prefer not to use beer? Substitute 12 ounces chicken broth and, if desired, an extra squeeze of fresh lime juice.

Christi Strayhorn, Sherwood (First Electric Cooperative)



Ozark Smoked Gouda & Roasted Corn Chowder

Makes 8 servings.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|---|
| 8 | slices thick-cut bacon, diced | 1 | teaspoon smoked paprika |
| 2 | tablespoons butter | 1/2 | teaspoon thyme |
| 1 | large sweet onion, diced | 1/4 | teaspoon cayenne, optional |
| 2 | celery stalks, diced | | Salt and pepper, to taste |
| 1 | red bell pepper, diced | 4 | cups roasted sweet corn, fresh or frozen |
| 4 | cloves garlic, minced | 2 | cups smoked Gouda cheese, shredded, plus more for topping |
| 1/4 | cup flour | 1/2 | cup sharp white cheddar cheese, shredded |
| 5 | cups chicken broth | 2 | green onions, sliced, for garnish |
| 2 | cups whole milk | | Fresh parsley, chopped, for garnish |
| 1 | cup heavy cream | | Crusty sourdough or skillet cornbread, for serving |
| 4 | medium Yukon Gold potatoes, diced | | |

In a large soup pot, cook bacon until crisp. Remove and reserve bacon, leaving about 2 tablespoons drippings. Add butter, onion, celery and bell pepper. Cook until soft, about 8 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook for 30 seconds.

Sprinkle flour over vegetables and stir for 2 minutes. Slowly whisk in broth, then milk and heavy cream. Add potatoes, smoked paprika, thyme, cayenne, if desired, and salt and pepper. Simmer for 20 minutes.

Stir in roasted corn and cook another 10 minutes. Using an immersion blender, blend about one-third of the soup, leaving plenty of texture. Remove from heat and stir in

both cheeses until smooth.

Top each bowl with bacon, green onions, parsley and a little extra smoked Gouda. Serve with crusty sourdough or skillet cornbread.

Notes: Every fall our family starts looking for the first cool weekend just so someone has an excuse to make this chowder. The roasted corn brings a little sweetness, the smoked Gouda gives it a campfire warmth, and the bacon ties everything together. It disappears before the bread basket is empty, and everyone asks for the recipe.

Trevor Rogers, Fort Smith (Arkansas Valley Electric Cooperative) 

Lasting Lessons

Carrie Altom and Jimi Ann Scott are
Arkansas Rural Teachers of the Year

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

Their classrooms are nearly 200 miles apart and their subjects are different, but Carrie Altom and Jimi Ann Scott share a commitment to their students and the communities they call home. Altom teaches in Tuckerman, in the agricultural heart of northeast Arkansas, while Scott teaches in Mount Ida, in the Ouachita Mountains of west-central Arkansas.

The two educators are the 2026 Arkansas Rural Education Association's Teachers of the Year, an award sponsored by the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas since 2004.

Their \$1,000 checks and crystal apple awards had been handed out, but Arkansas Living still had some homework to do. Our assignment: Head back to class with Altom and Scott to find out what earns two rural teachers top marks.

Carrie Altom, Tuckerman High School, Tuckerman

Carrie Altom's eighth grade literacy classroom at Tuckerman High School has a rhythm all its own. The pace is quick, and the point is participation. She poses a question about prepositions, sends students into timed conversation



Tuckerman High School literacy teacher Carrie Altom is a 2026 Arkansas Rural Education Association Teacher of the Year.

with their teams, then directs them back together to share what they've discovered. "What do you notice?" "Talk to me." And never far behind: "Good job." "Awesome job." "Way to go."

It's a rhythm that Altom, who puts a premium on classroom management, builds with purposeful routines, active engagement and plenty of encouragement.

She expects students to be ready and push themselves, whether she's setting a task — "Make that happen for me, please" — or asking them to tackle vocabulary that doesn't come easily.

Struggle, after all, is part of the lesson.

"In this classroom, we do hard things," she says.

Altom has been teaching for 18 years, but there were signs of her future passion much earlier. She played school as a child and wanted to teach "everybody everything."

"My family always said I would be a teacher," she says. "It was almost like it was just meant to be."

Altom grew up just 15 miles from Tuckerman, attended school in Newport and now lives in Diaz, so the community she teaches in has always been close to home.

Her route to the classroom wasn't a straight one. Altom married, had children and finished her bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies at Arkansas State University at 27 before beginning her career at Tuckerman. She later earned a master's degree in teaching from the University of Central Arkansas and is now pursuing a second master's degree with an eye toward future leadership.

Teaching is a family affair for the Altoms. She calls her husband, Bryson, "a teacher's husband through and through," while daughter Audrey is considering becoming a teacher herself. Son Zack is a travel welder, giving Altom a personal connection when she talks with students about skilled trades and paths beyond college.

While Altom began teaching science, she now teaches eighth grade literacy for half the day and serves as an instructional facilitator for the other half. Her students know her not as Ms. Altom, but "Ms. Carrie," a name that began when she taught younger children and "Ms. Altom" seemed too formal.

The familiarity suits what Altom values about teaching in a rural school. She knows her students' families, sports, clubs and backgrounds.

"I think that's why I could never teach at a huge school," she says.

That familiarity doesn't mean lowering expectations. Altom believes students are capable of more than they sometimes realize, so she works to create a classroom that challenges them while giving them the support they need to succeed. There are moments when she wonders if she ➤



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Grandma Moses, The Family Picnic (detail), 1951, oil on high-density fiberboard, Private collection, Promised gift to the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, Los Angeles, © Grandma Moses Properties Co., NY

has set the bar too high, but then she sees her students rise to the challenge and accomplish things they may not have thought possible.

“At the end of the year, when you see them grow 45 percentage points, you know the hard work is paying off and that they are capable of incredible growth,” Altom says.

She is quick to share the credit with the teachers and administrators around her, describing a school where students are known, encouraged and supported by an entire team.

In a rural school, “no kid goes without an army behind them,” she says.

As for her own proudest accomplishment, Altom does not point to an award or credential.

“Growth. Growing my students,” she says. “I’m contributing to their learning and that’s something that’s going to carry for a lifetime.”

Jimi Ann Scott, Bobby Barrett Elementary School, Mount Ida

By Jimi Ann Scott’s calculations, she was never going to be a teacher — math or otherwise.

But the numbers have a funny way of adding up: five years in health care, six years in the classroom and now one Arkansas Rural Teacher of the Year honor for the fifth and sixth grade math teacher.

Scott grew up in Mount Ida, attending school there from preschool through 12th grade, but teaching wasn’t part of her plan when she left for Southern Arkansas



Bobby Barrett Elementary School math teacher Jimi Ann Scott is a 2026 Arkansas Rural Education Association Teacher of the Year.

University. After earning a degree in exercise science, she became a physical therapist assistant, working in hospital, home health and outpatient settings.

“My daughter was only a year old, and I knew that I couldn’t do that forever, not with children and be a present mom,” Scott says.

She and her husband, Rowdy, returned home in 2020, when he accepted a teaching

and coaching position in Mount Ida. Scott took a job as a special education paraprofessional, began working toward a master’s degree and soon moved into a third-grade classroom under a provisional license.

Today, Scott teaches in the same school community where her roots run deep. At the top of a social contract in her classroom are the words, “Our class is a family.” And in her case, that sentiment is literal, too.

Rowdy teaches physical education and coaches football and baseball in the district. Scott’s daughter, Poppy Jean, is a second grader, while son, Fletcher, attends preschool.

“We just, we know this is where we wanted to be and where we wanted our kids to be,” Scott says.

Scott describes her teaching style as “very motherly.” She and her students created the social contract together, identifying qualities including kindness, respect, fairness, trust, empathy and accountability before signing their names.

“I want to treat them how I would want my kids treated, and I try to be a safe place for them,” Scott says.

On a recent morning, Scott’s sixth graders begin a unit on ratios, working through examples involving everything from colored pencils to the number of boys and girls in their own class.

“The order matters,” Scott reminds them, moving around the room checking their progress and working with those who need a little extra help.

Scott pays particular attention to students who come into her classroom convinced math simply isn’t their subject. She works to change that mindset and help them build confidence in what they can do.

“We talk about how it may not be your favorite thing, but you can do it, and we can learn to do it,” she says. “You may not be quick, but we can learn strategies to help us.”

Last year, Scott taught sixth graders who had gone through several different math teachers the previous school year. The group entered sixth grade at 15% proficiency. By year’s end, 74% were proficient, every student had shown growth and the class ranked in the top 4% of the state for growth.

“I’m very proud of those kids,” Scott says. “They worked hard every day all year long.” She also credits her fellow teachers and administrators, who create an environment where students are known, cared for and encouraged to succeed.

While scores matter, especially to a math teacher, Scott says academic growth is just part of the equation when it comes to how students will remember her.

“I wanted them to learn the material, but I wanted them to know that I cared about them first,” she says. 



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Outdoor Outreach

Cross Trail Outfitters connects young men through hunting, fishing and faith



BY CARLTON AND LEIGH WING

If you've traveled through Norfolk, Mountain Home or other renowned state fishing destinations, you have likely seen beautiful murals of brown trout brightening buildings. Look closely, and you'll

spot the signature of Arkansas artist and fly fisherman Duane Hada.

Hada knows The Natural State's waters and woods well. In addition to literally painting the town, running an art studio and teaching others the art of fly fishing, he serves as Arkansas state director for Cross Trail Outfitters (CTO), a hunting and fishing organization that helps young men discover the skills, traditions and friendships found in the woods and on the water.

For Hada, the work has personal meaning. His wife once spoke of students in need of positive male role models, and her concerns stayed with him. Recognizing that hunting and fishing traditions are often passed down through family, Hada saw an opportunity to share more than hunting and fishing knowledge. He could offer mentorship, encouragement and meaningful experiences to young people who might otherwise never have those opportunities.

"I think it's just natural for boys to want to be outdoors," Hada says. "We've got this huge environment here in the Ozarks and everywhere, really, so I think there's a natural calling in a young man or a boy to be outside. We've lost that a little bit."

Through CTO, young men can experience Arkansas' outdoors firsthand. With year-round hunting and fishing excursions led by experienced guides, CTO helps participants develop new skills and confidence. Summer camps expand the experience with swimming, archery, canoeing and shooting instruction.

The organization also emphasizes faith, character and service, seeking to "guide the next generation to Christ through the outdoors." Local chapters gather for Sportsmen's Nights, Bible studies and family events,



ABOVE Posing with one of his trout murals, artist Duane Hada is the Cross Trail Outfitters director.

LEFT Hada teaches hunting skills to youth involved in Cross Trail Outfitters, an organization that helps young men discover skills, traditions and friendships in the outdoors.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DUANE HADA



while community partnerships give young

men opportunities to serve others.

Hada believes time outdoors offers something increasingly rare: an opportunity to unplug and appreciate the world around us. "We get a time when we are disconnected from the internet," he says, "and we can look at the stars and recognize that there is a God and He created all of this."

CTO primarily serves males ages 7 to 20, while families and girls are invited to participate in select activities. To learn more about how you can get involved or find a local chapter, visit teamcto.org. To watch CTO in action, visit "Arkansas' Great Outdoors," Episode 1 (youtube.com/@ArkansasGreatOutdoors).

Carlton and Leigh Wing host the "Arkansas' Great Outdoors" weekly television series. Visit facebook.com/arkansasgreatoutdoors.

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Generation Conservation initiative provides an authentic learning environment for teachers and K-12 students in Arkansas to engage and compete in outdoor education programming.

The program culminates in an educational summit hosted in Hot Springs on Nov. 4-5, creating opportunities for students and educators to learn directly from conservation professionals. If you're a teacher or mentor to public, private, charter, or homeschool students, AGFC invites you to see what's possible in your classroom.



LEARN MORE



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Fair Value

Arkansas State Fair adds no-cost attractions

BY JACK SCHNEDLER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE FAIR

This month's 86th Arkansas State Fair, taking place Oct. 16-25, has good news for value-minded visitors at a time when so many prices are continuing to climb.

"We are taking the fair in a new direction this year, with a greater focus on free attractions and entertainment for our visitors," says General Manager Tiffany Wilkerson. "As part of this change, we will no longer have ticketed shows in Barton Coliseum. And the Hiland Dairy Fun Zone will offer an expanded lineup of exciting free attractions."

In another boon for fair-goers, prices for admission, parking and midway-ride day bands remain the same as last year.

The fair, which is sponsored by the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas, is bringing back the free Sea Lion Splash, while adding two new no-charge attractions, the Paul Bunyan Lumberjack Show and the HoopYou dancers. The free outdoor music stage will host local and regional acts.

"Our goal is to provide more free entertainment and other attractions throughout the grounds," Wilkerson says. "That will give families and other guests more chances to enjoy the fair without additional show costs."

Food finds

The Arts & Crafts Building hosts an array of cooking and creative-arts events with various sponsors. The food competitions range from desserts to sweet potatoes to peanut butter to hamburger steaks to hot-dog eating. Painting, photography and creative writing

are among the arts categories.

New food concessions for 2026 will include "hot honey mac-and-cheese, maple bacon mac-and-cheese, peach cobbler in a cone with bourbon caramel sauce, and funnel cake bacon fries. We had great feedback on the grilled cheese we introduced last year, so we are excited to have it returning," Wilkerson says.



From kid-friendly classics to high-flying thrills, the fair has rides for all ages.



ABOVE The Arkansas State Fair returns Oct. 16-25 with all the midway favorites.



LEFT Experience the fair's wild side by visiting the livestock barns and shows.

Fair flair

The midway is adding two rides to its thrills and chills. The newcomers are the Super Miami and the Downdraft, joining old favorites like the Outlaw Roller Coaster, the Tilt-a-Whirl and the more sedate Tea Cups.

The fair has good-value promotions every day. The most popular, Wilkerson says, is Lunch at the Fair. It provides free parking and admission from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday.

An Oct. 19 deal lets youngsters age 6 and under enjoy Kiddie Rides for free from 9 to 11 a.m., before regular opening time, with free parking and admission for guardians. Oct. 21 is Ladies Night Out, providing free admission starting at 6 p.m. for women 21 and up. On Oct. 22, college students with a valid school ID are admitted free from 6 p.m. to closing.

The fair's youth curfew will be imposed again this year. All fair attendees under age 18 must be accompanied by an adult after 6 p.m.

"Our goal every year is to create a safe, welcoming and enjoyable environment for everyone who attends," Wilkerson says. "We have tremendous support from both local and state law enforcement. I also want our guests to know that experiencing the fairgrounds at night is one of the best parts of the fair." 

ARKANSAS STATE FAIR

Arkansas State Fairgrounds, 2600 Howard St., Little Rock
Dates: Oct. 16-25, Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. daily
arkansasstatefair.com

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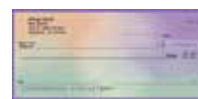
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There's Something Different About a Cooperative

October is National Co-op Month, and while it gives us a reason to celebrate, the cooperative spirit isn't something that only shows up on the calendar once a year.

At First Electric, it shows up every day.

It's there when a crew waves to a member while working along a county road. It's in the familiar voice on the other end of the phone when someone has an account question. It's an employee volunteering at a local event, supporting a school or simply helping a neighbor.

Those everyday moments tell the story of what it means to be a cooperative better than any definition ever could.

First Electric was built by people who believed their communities deserved dependable electric service. Generations later, that same sense of purpose continues to guide us.

Our communities have certainly changed. Homes have been built where fields once stood. Technology has transformed the way we live and work. Members expect more information, more convenience and more ways to stay connected.

And we've grown right alongside them.

Today, First Electric continues investing in the electric system that powers homes, farms and businesses across our service territory. Through Connect2First, we're also connecting communities with high-speed fiber internet and creating opportunities that would have been difficult to imagine when our cooperative first began.

But even as technology changes, some things shouldn't.

We still believe local relationships matter. We still believe in answering when our members need us. And we still believe the communities we serve should be stronger because First Electric is part of them.

That may be the simplest way to explain the cooperative difference.

We aren't just serving communities across Arkansas.
We're part of them.

This October, we're grateful for the members who have trusted First Electric through the generations and for the employees who carry that responsibility forward every day.

From all of us at First Electric and Connect2First, thank you for allowing us to serve you — and for making this cooperative something we can all be proud to call ours.



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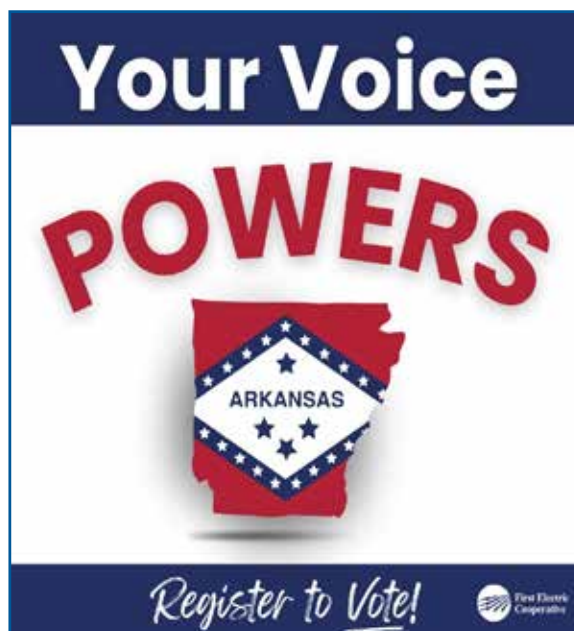
Election Day is right around the corner, and now is the time to make sure you're ready to vote.

Arkansas' General Election will be held **Tuesday, Nov. 3**, with early voting beginning **Oct. 19**. If you aren't registered to vote, the deadline to register for this election is **Monday, Oct. 5**.

Already registered? Take a few minutes to make sure your voter information is current, especially if you've recently moved or changed your name.

You can register to vote, check your registration status, find your polling location and view election information through the Arkansas Secretary of State's office at sos.arkansas.gov.

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Thanks Local Legislators

We appreciate the Arkansas legislators who have joined the Rural Electric Cooperative Caucus and taken the time to learn more about the electric cooperatives that power communities across our state.

The caucus gives legislators an opportunity to connect directly with their local electric cooperatives, better understand the challenges and opportunities facing our industry, and learn how the decisions made at the Capitol can affect the members and communities we serve.

Electric cooperatives are more than electric providers. We are local partners committed to keeping power reliable and affordable while supporting economic development and helping our communities grow and thrive.

Thank you to our caucus members for working alongside Arkansas' electric cooperatives as we continue powering our communities and building a stronger future for rural Arkansas.

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- Use smart plugs or timers for lamps, coffee makers and other electronics.
- Unplug rarely used devices rather than leaving them in standby mode.



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Snapshots from our readers

For Halloween, Charlie is dressed as a lineworker, just like her daddy. Kara Riley, Kingston.



Slaiman's Halloween garbage truck, making a huge haul! Heather Rex, Prairie Grove.



Penelope, Greyson and Kellan. This is truly terrifying! Olivia Hogue, Camden.



Ila grew her own pumpkin! Elizabeth Simkins, Uniontown.

For more Reflections photos go to arkansaslivingmagazine.com/story-category/reflections.



The kids from Nanny's (Sharon Partain) Day Care grew these pumpkins and now have them for sale! Donna Jackson, Cedarville.



Boston has the perfect picks from the pumpkin patch. Marcia Johnson, Van Buren.

PHOTO CONTEST

Enter our Arkansas Living reader photo contest!

Arkansas Living seeks your breathtaking photos that showcase the year-round beauty of The Natural State.

Winners will have their photos printed in our January 2027 issue — and maybe even on the magazine cover!

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

- Photos can feature nature, wildlife/animals, landscapes, weather, flowers and structures.
- Photos can be vertical or horizontal.
- Photos can be from any time, not necessarily this year.



Mud Boy, Bono — KRISTIN GRAVES



Pin Drops, Bella Vista — WAYNE COOK

- Photos must be at least 1 MB, high-resolution (300 dpi) and JPG format.

- Photo file names must contain the following information:

PHOTOGRAPHER NAME_TITLE OF PHOTO_

LOCATION OF WHERE PHOTO WAS TAKEN.

(Example: Willie Nelson_On the Road Again_Scenic Highway 7.jpg)

- Please do not include people in your photos unless you have permission from those photographed.
- Photos with photographer watermarks will not be accepted.
- Photos generated or edited by artificial intelligence (AI) will not be accepted.
- When uploading your photo, please select ONE topic category from the selection that best describes your photo.

- **Please submit photos online by Nov. 1 to: arkansaslivingmagazine.com/2027-photo-contest**

Arkansas Living reserves the right to use submitted photos for the magazine, website, social media and other published pieces by the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas with photographer credit.

Fall Flourish

Cool-season color brightens autumn landscapes

BY JANET B. CARSON



I think gardeners statewide are breathing a huge sigh of relief that summer is over. Gardens struggled mightily this growing season, and unless they were watered well, many plants did not thrive.

We had extreme heat for weeks at a time, with spotty rainfall. Color has been sorely lacking in many gardens, and now is a great time to remedy that. From cool-season annuals to fall-flowering perennials, along with instant color from pumpkins, gourds and Halloween decor, you have a lot of options. Clean up dead or damaged plants and start adding color. 



TYPE	OPTIONS	CHARACTERISTICS
Annuals	Pansies and violas	Wide range of colors. Some have dark blotches or faces; some are solid. Should last through spring.
	Flowering kale and cabbage	Mounds of green with white, pink or purple leaves. Severe cold can burn them.
	Giant purple mustard	Dramatic shades of purple and magenta foliage. Can get large over time. Cold-tolerant.
	Swiss chard	Edible ornamental with brightly colored stems. Showy plants. Protect if temperatures fall below 28 degrees.
	Snapdragons	If they are blooming at planting, they will bloom off and on all winter. If planted as small green plants, they may not bloom until spring.
Perennials	Asters	Shades of blue, pink or purple. Bloom for four to six weeks.
	Chrysanthemums	Many color options. Often treated as annuals but can provide color for two months if watered.
	Goldenrod	Numerous varieties with bright yellow flowers. Long-lived and drought-tolerant. Provide two to three months of color.
	Japanese anemones	Pink or white flowers bloom on delicate foliage. Showy plants bloom for two months.
	Perennial salvia	Wide range of plants to choose from, with variability in height and flower color. Long-lived and long-blooming.
Seasonal accents	Gourds Pumpkins Hubbard squash Cornstalks	Every year, the number of options increases. There are pumpkins and gourds in all sizes and colors. Mass them together to make a statement. They can last for two to three months.

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Grilled Cheese? Yes, Please!

Melty twists on soup's favorite sidekick

RECIPES AND PHOTOS
BY JULIANA GOODWIN

Pesto Three-Cheese Grilled Cheese

Makes 1 sandwich.

- | | | | |
|-------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | tablespoon mayonnaise | 1 | slice Swiss cheese |
| 1 1/2 | tablespoons pesto sauce | 1 | slice Havarti cheese |
| 2 | slices Italian or sourdough bread | | Tomato, sliced thin, (optional), patted dry |
| 1 | slice provolone cheese | | Olive oil or melted butter for brushing |

In a bowl, stir together mayonnaise and pesto. Spread on inside of bread.

Add cheeses and tomato slice, if using, and close sandwich. Brush outside of bread with olive oil or melted butter.

Heat a nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add sandwich and cook for 2-3 minutes per side or until golden.



Buffalo Grilled Cheese

Makes 1 sandwich.

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1/3 | cup rotisserie chicken breast, finely chopped | 1 | slice extra-sharp cheddar cheese |
| 2 | tablespoons Buffalo wing sauce | 1 | slice Havarti or provolone cheese |
| 2 | slices Italian or sourdough bread | | Softened butter for spreading |

In a bowl, stir together chicken and wing sauce. Spread on one bread slice. Top with cheeses and close sandwich. Butter outside of bread.

Heat a nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add sandwich and cook for 2-3 minutes per side or until golden.





Jalapeno Popper Grilled Cheese

Makes 1 sandwich.

- | | | | |
|-------|--|---|--|
| 2 | slices Hawaiian or sourdough bread | 3 | jalapeno pepper slices (fresh or pickled), chopped |
| 1 1/2 | tablespoons whipped cream cheese | 1 | slice extra-sharp cheddar cheese |
| 1 | tablespoon real bacon pieces | 1 | slice Havarti cheese |
| 2 | teaspoons jalapeno or hot pepper jelly | | Softened butter for spreading |

In a bowl, combine cream cheese, bacon, hot pepper jelly and jalapeno. Spread on one bread slice. Top with cheeses and close sandwich. Butter outside of bread.

Heat a nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add sandwich and cook for 2-3 minutes per side or until golden.

Note: Hawaiian bread browns faster because of its higher sugar content, so watch it carefully.



This month's web exclusive recipe:

Ham & Apple Butter Grilled Cheese

More recipes on our website: arkansaslivingmagazine.com

Juliana Goodwin is a food columnist, cookbook author and avid traveler. If you have a question, email julianalovesfood23@gmail.com.



Co-op Comforts

Cozy staff recipes to savor this fall

Lisa's Pumpkin Bars

Makes 24-30 servings.

Bars	1/2	teaspoon salt
Shortening and flour or nonstick baking spray	1/4	teaspoon ground cloves
1 cup oil	2	teaspoons cinnamon
4 eggs	Icing	
1 (15-ounce) can pure pumpkin	1	(8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
2 cups sugar	2	sticks butter, softened
2 cups flour	4	cups powdered sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder	4	teaspoons vanilla extract
1 teaspoon baking soda		

For bars: Heat oven to 350. Grease and flour a 12x18-inch (sheet cake) pan or coat with nonstick baking spray.

In a mixing bowl, beat together all bar ingredients. Pour batter into prepared pan. Bake for 20 minutes. Cool completely.

For icing: In a mixing bowl, beat cream cheese, butter, powdered sugar and vanilla until smooth. Spread over cooled bars.

Lisa Freeman, payment processing specialist, Arkansas Valley Electric



JENNIFER CHRISTMAN, CJA

Chicken and Dumplings

Makes 8 generous servings.

Chicken

- 1 whole chicken
- Water, as needed
- 1/2 cup onion, chopped
- 1 (22.6-ounce) can cream of mushroom soup
- 1/3 cup celery, chopped or 1 teaspoon celery seed
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Dumplings

- 4 cups flour, plus more for rolling and dusting
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 tablespoons all-purpose seasoning (I use Cavender's Greek)
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 4 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups milk, plus more as needed

For chicken: In a pot, cover chicken with water and boil for 45-50 minutes. Remove chicken, reserving broth. Remove skin and chicken from the bone, cut into pieces and set aside. Add onion, cream of mushroom soup, celery or celery seed, salt and pepper to broth.

For dumplings: Combine flour, pepper, salt, seasoning and baking powder in a mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, combine eggs and milk. Add wet mixture to dry ingredients and mix to form a thick, sticky dough, adding a little more milk if needed. Gradually work in additional flour until dough is no longer sticky.

Tape overlapping sheets of wax paper to a work surface to form approximately a 2x2-foot square. Generously flour wax paper. Place half of dough on floured surface and roll to 1/4-inch thickness or thinner, flipping dough and adding flour as needed to prevent sticking. Keep dough lightly coated with flour.

Cut dough into approximately 1x3-inch dumplings (a pizza cutter works well). Lightly coat both sides of dumplings with flour and layer on a plate. Repeat with remaining dough. If not cooking immediately, refrigerate dumplings until ready to add to broth.

Bring broth mixture to a boil. Add dumplings one at a time, using a fork to gently move dumplings aside as more are added. Add chicken.

Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for about 40 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Jerry Driskill, vice president of operations, First Electric

Submit your favorite recipes! If your recipe is selected for printing, we will send you an Arkansas-shaped cookie cutter, complete with a QR code linking to cookie recipes.

Email: arkansasliving@aeci.com Online: arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submit-a-recipe

Entries must include your name, phone, address and origin of recipe.



Barbara's Game Day Meatballs

Makes about 108 meatballs.

Meatballs		2	teaspoons chili powder
2	pounds ground chuck	1/2	teaspoon pepper
1	pound mild sausage (I use J.C. Potter)	1/2	teaspoon garlic powder
1	(5-ounce) can evaporated milk (I use PET)	Sauce	
2	cups oats	1/2	cup onion, chopped
2	eggs	2	cups ketchup
1/2	cup chopped onion	1 1/2	cups sugar
2	teaspoons salt	1/2	teaspoon garlic powder
		1	teaspoon liquid smoke

Heat oven to 350.

For meatballs: In a mixing bowl, combine all meatball ingredients.

Mix well and shape into 1-inch meatballs. Place meatballs in a single layer in two large baking dishes.

For sauce: In a mixing bowl, combine all sauce ingredients. Mix well. Pour sauce over meatballs. Bake for 1 hour.

Callie Davidson, billing/capital credit specialist, Petit Jean Electric

Easy Caramel Apple Dip

Makes about 10 servings.

- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- Vanilla extract, to taste
- Jarred caramel sauce for topping
- Toffee pieces for topping
- Red and green apples, sliced, for serving

In a mixing bowl, beat cream cheese, powdered sugar and vanilla extract with a mixer until smooth. Spread mixture evenly in an 8x8 serving dish. Pour caramel sauce over cream cheese mixture and spread evenly. Top with toffee pieces.

Serve with sliced apples.

Dana Weast, member service representative, C & L Electric



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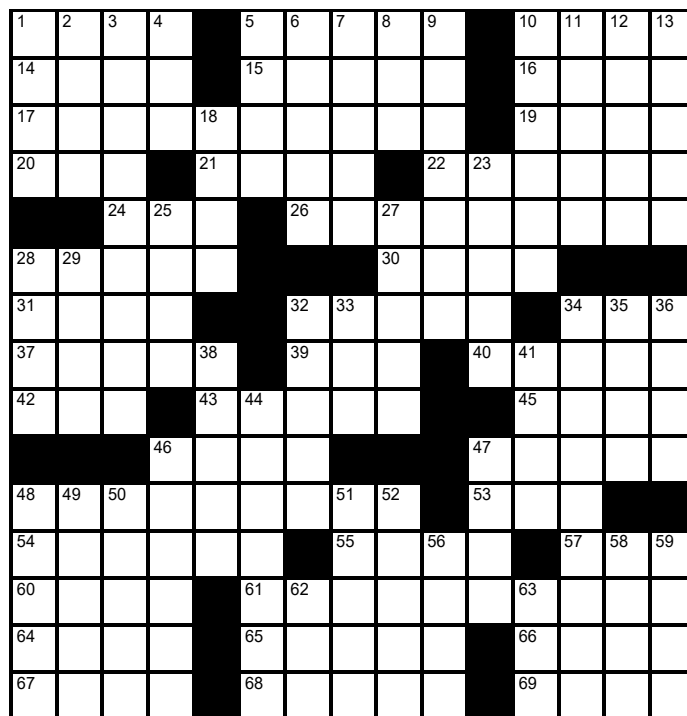


CROSSWORD PUZZLE

But is it 39-Across? By Victor Fleming

ACROSS

- 1 "Make the ____ of it"
- 5 Learn gradually
- 10 Camera accessory
- 14 The New Yorker cartoonist
- 15 Combine, as traffic lanes
- 16 "Thanks ____!"
- 17 Start of a quotation
- 19 "Come inside and ____ spell"
- 20 Barnyard female
- 21 "What got ____ you?"
- 22 Redeem
- 24 Ashen
- 26 Part 2 of the quotation
- 28 1984 Olympic skier Phil
- 30 City areas, in 47-Across
- 31 "I cannot tell ____!"
- 32 "Ransom" actress Rene
- 34 Neither super nor awful
- 37 Add up
- 39 Part 3 of the quotation
- 40 Valerie Harper title role
- 42 Where "fore" is yelled
- 43 Post-deuce scores
- 45 "That's ____ haven't heard"
- 46 Jeanne d'Arc, et al. (abbr.)
- 47 Informal language
- 48 Part 4 of the quotation
- 53 Harris and Begley
- 54 "The Devil Wears Prada" star
- 55 Kind of argument
- 57 Helpers for profs
- 60 "Get ____ writing!"
- 61 End of the quotation
- 64 1920s style, briefly
- 65 Bridge players on the right
- 66 Hedging words



- 67 "You are" in Spain
- 68 Susan of acting
- 69 Computer information unit

DOWN

- 1 Atlas entries
- 2 Cookie since 1912
- 3 Friend to seven dwarfs
- 4 Big ____ (circus)
- 5 Male FBI agents
- 6 "... don't have a ____ stand on"
- 7 Swashbuckling Flynn
- 8 "... and seven years ____"
- 9 Dealership's inventory
- 10 Cowboy ropes
- 11 Root or Yale
- 12 Out
- 13 Get to one's feet
- 18 "A Chorus ____"
- 23 Ann ____
- 25 Bay or gray follower
- 27 Does some housework
- 28 With 36-Across, "The Midnight Train" novelist and source of the quotation
- 29 Additive to lotions
- 32 Former Soviet first lady
- 33 Banquet dispenser
- 34 Religious residence
- 35 Genesis setting
- 36 See 28-Down
- 38 Carpenter's machine
- 41 "____ your horses!"
- 44 Fishing locale
- 46 Dictation takers
- 47 Egotist's first love
- 48 Back of an old hit single
- 49 Complete and total
- 50 Brief moment
- 51 Bake in an oven
- 52 Word with remember or forget
- 56 ADA part
- 58 Pt. of 57-Across
- 59 "If the ____ fits ..."
- 62 Light brown
- 63 Burglarize

CROSSWORD ANSWERS ON PAGE 39

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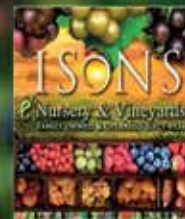


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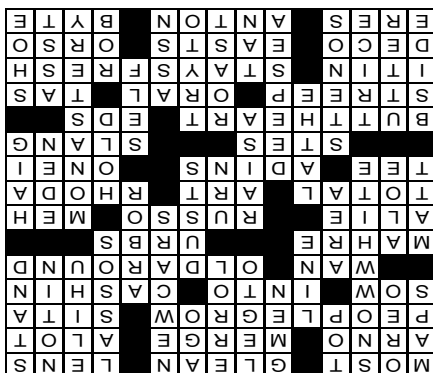
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CROSSWORD ANSWERS

for puzzle on page 38



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Make a mountain of memories at The Ol' Cabin

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVID COPELAND

Perched atop a ridge overlooking the rolling Boston Mountains of northwest Arkansas, The Ol' Cabin is one of those rare destinations where scenery, history, hospitality and food come together to create an experience that lingers long after the last bite.

Located halfway between Alma and Fayetteville, it's easy to reach but feels a world away. Whether you're heading to or from the area, it's the kind of lunch stop that often turns into a leisurely afternoon.

Before you ever glance at a menu, your attention is drawn to the cabin itself.

Standing proudly atop the hill is an authentic pre-Civil War log cabin whose weathered timbers quietly tell stories stretching back more than a century. Visitors are welcome inside, where it's impossible not to imagine a crackling fireplace, boots by the door, children laughing nearby and an Ozark family gathering after a long day's work to share a simple meal.

The views are equally unforgettable. The rugged Boston Mountains stretch across the horizon, while towering shade trees and mountain breezes make the property inviting through much of the year. In autumn, the surrounding hills become a brilliant patchwork of crimson, amber, burnt orange and gold.

Owners Gabe and Shawna Morris didn't simply open a restaurant in 2025, they created a gathering place.

Inside, reclaimed treasures, vintage signs and rustic antiques create an atmosphere that's part restaurant, part museum and part family living room. Outside, guests can enjoy playing cornhole, horseshoes, giant Jenga and tic-tac-toe while soaking in the mountain setting. Every memorable restaurant has a signature item, and at The Ol' Cabin, it's the legendary Ol' Cabin Sauce.

Created by Gabe, the house-made recipe blends 18 wet and dry ingredients into a sauce featured throughout the menu.

Bottles are available for purchase, and empty bottles can be brought back for refills — a thoughtful touch that reflects the Morris family's commitment to building lasting relationships rather than one-time visitors.

My meal began with Smash Tots, a generous serving of crispy tater tots topped with melted American cheese, seasoned smash burger, grilled onions, bacon and plenty of Ol' Cabin Sauce. Rich, savory and wonderfully indulgent, they disappeared almost immediately.

The Mesquite Grilled Chicken Wrap delivered fresh, smoky flavor, while the Penelope Burger combined a seasoned all-beef patty with Swiss cheese,



ABOVE Grilled Artesano bread, smoky bacon and Swiss cheese elevate the Penelope Burger at The Ol' Cabin.



LEFT Guests at The Ol' Cabin can enjoy mountain views stretching for miles while exploring the property's historic pre-Civil War log cabin.



A customer favorite, the Mega Double Ol' Cabin Ham-Burger combines bold flavors and towering portions for a meal worthy of its mountain setting.



THE EATING ESSENTIALS

The Ol' Cabin

11218 Devils Den Road
Winslow
(479) 304-4049
tinyurl.com/TheOlCabin

Hours of Operation

Wednesday-Thursday: 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
Friday-Saturday: 11 a.m.-7 p.m.
Sunday: 11 a.m.-3 p.m.



bacon, tomato and grilled Artesano bread for a classic done exceptionally well. The All-American Smash Burger featured crispy-edged patties, grilled onions, melted American cheese and the signature sauce. It was everything a smash burger should be.

Then came the showstopper.

The Mega Double Ol' Cabin Ham-Burger is less a sandwich than an engineering feat. Towering with two hefty sirloin patties, cheese, bacon, ham, a fried egg, jalapenos, fresh vegetables and Ol' Cabin Sauce, it's every bit as impressive as it is delicious. Whether you tackle it alone or share it with friends, it's guaranteed to become part of the conversation and your camera roll.

Just 5 miles from Devil's Den State Park, The Ol' Cabin is perfectly positioned for hikers, campers, weekend travelers and anyone exploring northwest Arkansas.

More importantly, it's one of those increasingly rare places where memories happen naturally. Families gather for photos beside the historic cabin, friends linger over one more game of cornhole, and travelers who planned a quick meal find themselves watching the afternoon drift by as mountain breezes sweep across the ridge.

If your travels take you along Interstate 49, make the short climb to The Ol' Cabin and discover why so many visitors leave already planning their next visit.

David Copeland is the manager of grants and economic development for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas. 



The Mesquite Grilled Chicken Wrap pairs smoky grilled chicken with fresh flavors for a satisfying lunch on the ridge.

Dining recommendations? Submit at: arkansaslivingmagazine.com/contact-us





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Calendar



North Little Rock Airshow

COURTESY OF NLR AIR SHOW



Arkansas Goat Festival

COURTESY OF ARKANSAS GOAT FESTIVAL



Hillberry Music Festival

GRAYSON SHELTON



Arkansas State Fair

ALEX KENT / ARKANSAS STATE FAIR



Bean Fest and
Championship Outhouse Races

COURTESY OF BEAN FEST AND CHAMPIONSHIP OUTHOUSE RACES

Oct. 2-3

Belle Point Quilters Guild Quilt Show
Fort Smith, bellepointquiltersguild.org

Ozark Trail Festival

Heber Springs, facebook.com/OzarkTrailFestival

Timberfest

Sheridan, grantcountychamber.com/timberfest

Oct. 2-4

Arkansas Apple Festival
Lincoln, arkansasapplefestival.com

Oct. 3

Art Fair
Bentonville, crystalbridges.org/events/art-fair

Ozark Moonshine and Music Festival

Clinton, ozarkmoonshinefest.org

NEBCO Fire & EMS Fall Festival

Garfield, nebcofireems.org

Arkansas Goat Festival

Perryville, arkansasgoatfestival.com

Frontier Day Festival

Paris, tinyurl.com/FrontierDay26

Oct. 3-4

International Greek Food Festival
Little Rock, greekfoodfest.com

High Cotton on the Bayou Festival

Scott, scottsettlement.com

Oct. 4

North Little Rock Airshow
North Little Rock, tinyurl.com/NLRAirShow

Oct. 7-11

Hillberry Music Festival
Eureka Springs, hillberryfestival.com

Oct. 8-10

King Biscuit Blues Festival
Helena, kingbiscuitfestival.com

CabotFest

Cabot, cabotcc.org/cabotfest-3

Oct. 9-10

Rusty Wheels Old Engine Fall Show
Harrison, rustywheelsusa.com

Oct. 10

Arkansas Rice Festival
Weiner, arkansasricefestival.com

Homestead Hootenanny

Eureka Springs, tinyurl.com/HomesteadHootenanny

Oct. 15-18

War Eagle Fair
Rogers, wareaglefair.com

Oct. 16-25

Arkansas State Fair
Little Rock, arkansasstatefair.com

Oct. 16-17

Mid South Music Festival
Arkadelphia, midsouthmusicfestival.com

Oct. 24

Howl-O-Ween at the Zoo
Little Rock, littlerock.com/events/howl-o-ween

Oct. 23-24

Bean Fest and Championship Outhouse Races
Mountain View, mountainviewarkansas.com/beanfest

Oct. 24

Corning Harvest Festival
Corning, facebook.com/corningharvestfestival

Oct. 24-25

Arkansas Paranormal Expo
Little Rock, arkansasparanormalexpo.com

Oct. 31

Día de Muertos
Little Rock, facebook.com/PlazaFrida
LittleRockAR

*Find more events at arkansaslivingmagazine.com/around-arkansas.
Submit events at arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submissions/submit-an-event.*



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